BLOGS AND MOBLOGS AS THE MEANS OF TEACHING PROCESS WRITING

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ABSTRACT

Speaking and listening are the starting points in the acquisition of a language and are learned naturally, while writing and reading are "culturally specific, learned behaviors" which are acquired only if someone is taught. Writing is not a spontaneous skill or acquired easily, in fact, it is viewed as "probably the most difficult thing to do in language". However, in classroom writing is taught through product approach, thus it had apparently been learned through models, rather than to encourage creativity and communication and language acquisition. The paper deals with scientific ideas about linguistic investigations for using internet sites, especially blogs and mobile blogs as the means of teaching writing through process approach.

Keywords: Writing, product approach, process writing, blog, mobile blogging or moblogging.

INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

While speech allows the user to exploit various devices such as body movement, gestures, facial expression, tone of voice, pitch, hesitation and stress to facilitate communication, this is not available to the writer. Nor can the writer clarify, revise or backtrack ideas when there is miscommunication or misunderstanding between reader and writer [Hedge 2005:7]. Writing to be effective is dependant on a number of features which are not shared by spoken language, not only in terms of linguistic and pragmatic features but also the context in which it will be interpreted. Writing is a "complex, cognitive process that requires sustained intellectual effort over a considerable period of time" [Nunan, 1999:273] as, according to Hedge [2005], there is a need to organise the development of ideas or information; ambiguity in meaning must be avoided through accuracy; the writer must choose from complex grammatical devices for emphasis or focus; and finally, they must pay attention to the choice of vocabulary, grammatical patterns and sentence structures to create a feasible meaning and an appropriate style to the subject matter and reader.

Writing practice in the classroom however, is often taken up for display purposes, to assess if students have learned language structures taught in class and for examination purposes. Here, the teacher is concerned with the final product of writing: an essay, a report,

an article or story, based on standard models; that these meet the standard English rhetorical style; and are grammatically correct and organised in a conventional manner [Brown, 2001:335].

Thus writing is apparently used to promote language learning, through models, rather than to encourage creativity and communication and language acquisition. To an extent, students simply have to follow a structure that has been provided, 'copy' the main structures and 'fill in' the rest depending on the context or writing task. An example might be a commercial letter, *I'm writing to inform you that*…,or report which are made up of pre-set expressions and sentences. Good writers will manage without any real difficulty and will know how to include more detailed information, whereas weak writers will limit themselves to the pre-set structures and will not learn nor practice how to develop ideas and put these into words.

In contrast to the product approach to writing, the process approach involves multiple and repeated steps that compel the writer to closely consider the topic, language, purpose for writing, and social reality of an audience. Although there are variations on how to use the process approach in the writing classroom, most share the basic principles of prewriting, peer and teacher feedback, and revision.

According to Ferris and Hedgcock [2005:8], "as a transactional activity, writing represents a process that must be undertaken with the reader's background knowledge, needs, interests and ideologies in mind."

Among the many tools to incorporate meaningful activities into the writing curriculum, the use of internet has opened up a gateway for learners to a virtual foreign world while mobile technology is bringing more features from the real world. Web based writing platforms allowing for exchanges across the world are increasingly being used in education. These recent forms of textual practice are highly related to conditions offered by the technology, allowing users, who previously were primarily consumers, to become producers of text.

Some examples of software that allows people to communicate and collaborate online are blogs, wikis and podcasts. Web 2.0 technologies [e.g., blogs, wikis, and social bookmarking] allow users to do more than just retrieve information with high levels of interactivity among people, allowing them to contribute, create and modify content collaboratively, share results and discover new and related content through informal relationships with others. Mobile 2.0 refers to services that integrate the social web with the core aspects of mobility – personal, localised, always-on and ever-present. Mobile devices are deployed in Mobile 2.0 such as smartphones and multimedia feature phones that are capable of delivering rich, interactive services, as well as being able to provide access to the full range of mobile consumer touchpoints including talking, texting, capturing, sending, listening and viewing.

The process approach to writing
Process writing may be a more effective method of teaching writing as it helps students to focus on the process of creating text through the various stages of generating ideas, drafting, revising and editing, a number of activities which can be represented as in Figure 1.

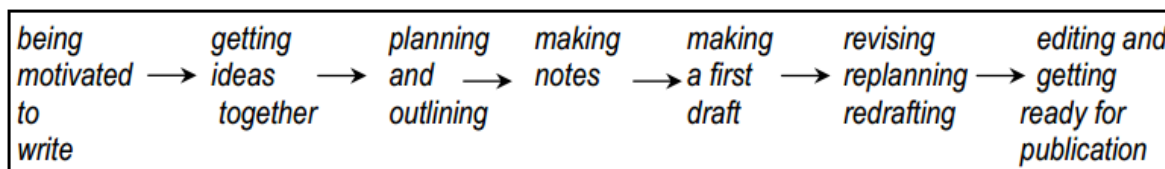| being motivated to write	→	getting ideas together	→	planning and outlining	→	making notes	→	making a first draft	→	revising replanning redrafting	→	editing and getting ready for publication

Figure 1-Stages involved in process writing [Hedge, 2005, 51]

According to numerous second language researchers and educators, ESL/EFL writing pedagogy should include:

1. a large amount of writing practice
2. several varieties of texts and motivating tasks
3. opportunities for revision and feedback
4. models of acceptable texts.

However, the writing assignments in textbooks do not always provide the information students need in order to develop effective writing strategies. Teachers should therefore plan their instruction to encompass all the stages of the writing process: brainstorming for ideas that are related to students' lives and about which they will have something to say; pre-writing that uses graphic organizers and outlines to show students how to plan their writing; drafting, revising, and asking for feedback through peer review; and using assessment rubrics that are shown to students before they produce their texts to make expectations clear. In a simplified manner, Figure 2, tries to demonstrate the complex and recursive nature of writing and the interaction between the different operations which may occur simultaneously [White and Arndt,1991:4; Hedge, 2005:50]. Our cognitive process or thinking is not linear. However, writing is linear and a writer must know how to organise his/her thoughts and message in an appropriate manner. Many writers often do not know what they want to write beforehand and many ideas are only revealed once the writer has started. They then move backwards to revise and change words or structures before they move forwards and they continue doing this until they are satisfied with the end result. Thus, writing is a "process through which meaning is created".
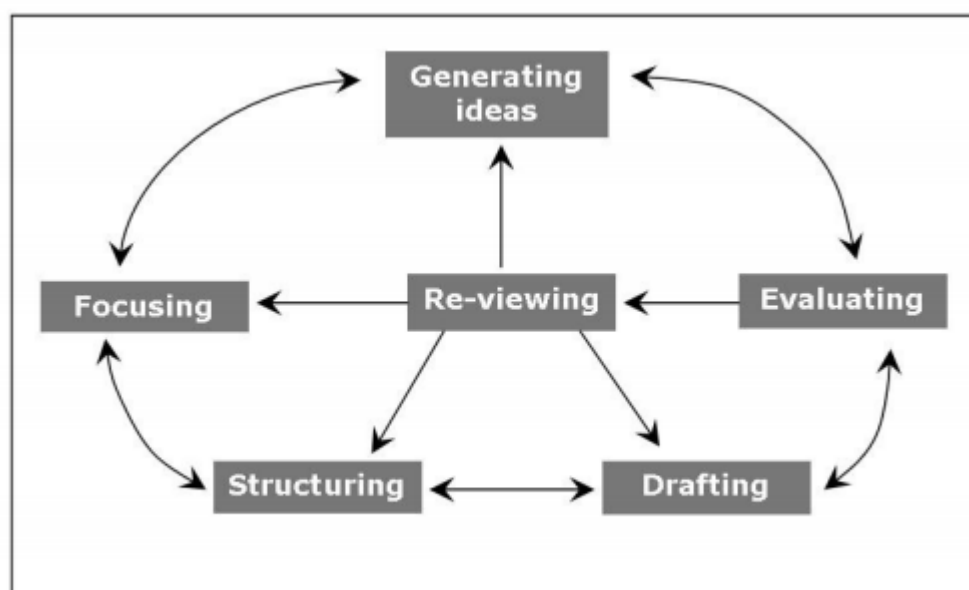
Figure 2 – A model of writing [White and Arndt, 1991:43]

Blogs

A blog [a blend of the words *web* and *log*] is a web page with regular diary or journal entries that incorporates different postings by authors and responses to these posts by an audience.

Among those web 2.0 services, blogs are commonly used by individuals for social purposes, the media, and organisations. Blogging opens up the possibility of regular peer assessment, helping learning anytime anywhere with collaboration, inclusiveness, flexibility and bringing more relevance to learners. Blogs afford self-expression, creativity, moving from knowledge consumer to knowledge producer and encouraging learners' authorship and engagement relevant to a larger, interactive community. Hanna and de Nooy [2003] believed that encouraging students to participate in non-educationally oriented online communities could develop awareness of appropriate genres of language use and patterns. Some linguists suggest blogs as social software can be used to enhance students' reading and writing, to increase their reflection both in their native language and the target language[s]. Blogs are receiving increasingly more attention in CALL research and second language instruction.

Moblogging

Blogging through mobile devices, which is called mobile blogging or moblogging. The mobile Internet gives its contribution to learning as mobile devices can be used to capture situations and helps the contextualisation of the learning resource [Rosenbloom, 2006]. Moblogs offer the potential to expound these benefits by removing time and place boundaries and adding authentic and personal visual content. Language learning can be enhanced by moblogging with easier and expanded interaction with other people and with the contexts in the real world. The mobile group blog as a mechanism to support language learning in a community is beneficial.

CONCLUSION

The various stages implied in process writing will encourage students to exploit the language resources they possess and build on them as they know they will not be judged or critiqued right away but will have an opportunity to revise, improve and correct before being evaluated. It is through time and practice and through well planned stages that we may change students' negative views and attitudes towards writing.

The result of process writing activities in the classroom is more than just the mere written text. Through integrated teaching, learners' language competence is comprehensively fostered from different sides so as to develop both receptive and productive skills resulting in an overall improvement of students' language competence.

Thus, if students learn to develop their skills and writing through process writing, then product writing will improve as well.

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